

2. Sexual Life between Maturity and Marriage

836 After reaching maturity, the girl is called ngān III, and the
 (994) young man nkō I; for both there is also the term bandy man,
 plural of ndy man = young man or girl at the age of being in love.

Thus the name itself shows under what sign the subsequent period of life is lived. Free love in the boldest sense of the word prevails. The girl may give away her favors without inhibition to whom and whenever she desires to do so, and she need only observe the religious rule that prohibits sexual intercourse during the day and the social rule that prohibits intercourse between blood relatives. Otherwise there is no barrier; members of the same age group come together and make thorough use of their freedom. In the initial period after maturity, to be sure, sexual desire is dampened by the moral admonitions of the cults with their proclamation of the sinfulness of sexual intercourse. This sinfulness, combined with physical satiety and psychic revulsion, produces a "moral hangover"; however, such considerations and feelings are soon overcome. As in eating, so in their love life, the Pangwe know no moderation. They empty the cup of joy to the lees. Later on, especially when the Pangwe has acquired several wives, he tends to develop a more business-like attitude towards sexual love, in place of the youthful amours which alternate unsteadily between ungoverned passion and its aftereffects, psychic unease.

[585] In view of this extensive free love, it goes without saying that the virginity of his future wife plays no role in the man's choice. Indeed, the presence of a hymen (ajadebā) is usually scarcely noticed and /254/ to some is totally unknown. Around the age of 15 years it is supposed to be destroyed by boys of the same age.

833 As for their libidinal drive, the girls are generally not inferior to the boys. However, we may say that for the girls potency
 936 alone is as a rule the deciding factor in the choice of a friend.
 [572] This fact is well expressed in the various dance songs at the Mbale (which, incidentally, were brought to the Fang and Ntum by the sexually loose Jaunde) as, for example, in the following complaint.
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583 sufficient time to get to know his future wife and her family.
 584 He treats them with the greatest consideration, and for the mother-
 606 in-law (nīe-ngōh III, that is, the girl's mother) especially he has
 an enormous amount of respect. He is courtesy itself, bringing
 her presents, large and small, and from time to time killing a
 chicken or a sheep for her. In short, one could in all seriousness
 speak of a mother-in-law cult (see the love feast, Vol. II, p. 24).
 And above all: oson, oson, oson: shame, shame, and more
 shame. The son-in-law is unspeakably ashamed before the
 mother-in-law, and vice versa, she before him. This is especially
 true after the wedding when the good mother-in-law extends her
 modesty also to the members of the son-in-law's kin group. Like
 a thief she steals behind the dwellings into her daughter's house
 in order not to be seen, and -- who knows? -- perhaps in order
 not to give rise to mother-in-law jokes.

Riddle:

[539] nē'n e bōnīe, e ne kaang
 [529] Way of the lizards, it is (in the) reeds (Cyperus)

Solution:

nē'n e bōnīngōh, e n' a
 Way of the mother-in-law, it is on (the) stretch

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behind the houses.

● 585 On the day when a man takes his young wife home, the village
 585 celebrates with a sizable dance, for which all adorn themselves to
 the best of their ability and which the young wife, red from red
 [302] wood dye, attends as guest of honor seated on a stool. On this
 occasion, the popping of blunderbuses may not be omitted, be-
 cause it belongs to the festive music like our flourish of trumpets.
 The dancing and shooting last several days when a wealthy chief
 has acquired a new wife or if it is the first wife of a fellow villager.
 There is nothing strikingly special about any of this; the festivity
 simply involves a series of different /262/ dances (among which
 the dischama is particularly popular which are also customary on
 other occasions.

585 After the wedding, the young bride is allowed a certain period
595 of rest (up to one month), during which she does not need to work.
Every day, newly painted with red wood, she struts around the
village. After this honeymoon she then proceeds to the diurnal
work in the field, while the man may possibly already be on the
lookout for a second wife. Incidentally, there are not many who
can afford the luxury of several wives; usually these are only the
chief, his brothers, and a number of other people. The great
majority must content themselves with a single wife. In former
[589] times there were even people who, for lack of money, were con-
demned to permanent bachelorhood because the opportunities for
earning money were not as favorable as they are today with
European commerce. In the account of the belief in souls (Vol.
II, p. 102 /Ed., not translated/), we mentioned how a loving
father procures a wife for his son by transforming himself into
a leopard.

622 The number of wives that the individual chief calls his own
595 decreases from north to south, precisely in the same proportion
194 as his power as a ruler decreases towards the south. The most
respected and greatest chiefs of the Mwele and Jaunde sometimes
possess up to 100 wives; similarly, Bulu chiefs with 50 wives are
not a rarity. Among the Fang, on the other hand, the chiefs have
only from 16 to 20 wives, at most 30, while in smaller villages
they may have as few as five or even fewer, since, as we have
seen /Ed., not translated/, anybody can become a chief (nkũkũma)
by founding a new village because in this village he will be the
"wealthiest."

837 The statement sounds harsh, but it must be made: the
woman's sexual life is basically a continuation of that of the girl,
perhaps in even more artful forms, in other words, a higher form
of prostitution. Marital fidelity is a great rarity, even though
my Blacks steadfastly maintained that this is not so. I myself
was only once shown a woman, as a "curiosity," who did not
permit herself to be seduced by other men, and this was not even
in the Pangwe region, but on my travels in Basá country. I do
not wish to deny that even among the Pangwe there are women
who remain faithful to their husbands without being compelled

583 to look for her, he gives them what he has in the way of money and goods, and the parents have to consent to the marriage by accepting this first payment. This practice is called abom.

584 This practice is exceptional, and the marriage proposal is generally made in a more conventional way. A man, having learned that there is a free woman in a neighboring tribe, a young girl or a repudiated wife, goes to the woman's parents and asks to see her. She comes [576] into the hut, sits down, and allows herself to be looked at. She does not speak if she has never been married, but she speaks if she is used to men; then she goes out after about an hour. Her brothers ask her opinion of the suitor and take the answer to the latter, who gives his opinion of the woman he has seen. This visit is called dzāga. If both agree to marry, they spend the night together; the man may leave in the morning without saying anything if the woman has not suited him and he does not wish to marry her. If it is the woman who is not satisfied, she asks her brothers to tell the suitor not to come back. In case of agreement, the suitor goes back several times for several days. The father of the woman fixes the amount of the dowry, and the suitor has to accept it.

586 If a married woman, not wishing to stay with her husband, goes off with another man, the latter pays the woman's parents the amount of the dowry which was paid by the former husband. This practice is fairly recent. In earlier times the former husband received the dowry of his successor directly or, if he refused it, it was a case of war unless another woman was given him in exchange.

583 Marriage is not considered final until the dowry has been paid in full by the husband. The amount is variable, currently about 1,500 or 2,000 francs, in money or in various goods. The woman leaves her tribe and goes to live with her husband. Her arrival at her new village is marked by celebrations. [89] She is accompanied by women who cry out "e e ke o o o ko"; these cries are called mekogo. The husband's mother recites to her the genealogy of her son; then the bride goes into her husband's hut where the women of her husband's family bring her food. She is confined here for a week, and this is the "good welcome to the bride," eyale mbom.

585 Two days after the arrival of the bride, there are songs and dances performed by women only: these are the bya bi mbom. The men play the tomtom and are spectators. This takes place near the husband's hut.

- 586 The day on which the woman is to come out of the hut, she is bathed
535 and anointed with an oil (mbon nzūi) and is seated on a stool placed in the middle of the village square. Other women sing and dance around her and give her a new name to represent a wish she has made.

There is no religious ceremony.

- 583 There also used to be a marriage by exchange of wives (mvole bunanga). With the mere consent of the women concerned, two men could exchange their wives. The parents of the wives did not interfere except to verify the amounts of the dowries and to make sure that the husband of the wife with the lesser dowry had fully paid the difference to the other.

- 593 The relations between married couples are simple: the man must
562 lodge his wife and clear the brush from the site where she will make her plantings; on the other hand, the wife owes absolute fidelity and obedience to her husband, who has the right to beat her. The woman has no authority in the household; she is hardly more respected than
[B32] a domestic animal; she owns in her own right only the cooking utensils and the tools for planting and fishing, and does not have the right to own
[B34] animals. Prohibition of sexual relations is rigidly observed during pregnancy, during lactation, and in the night preceding departure for the hunt, work at the forge, and various [other] tasks. If the prohibition were not observed, these tasks would be unsuccessful.

- 595 Polygamy is the present custom among the Fan. The first wife has authority over the others, who must obey her. She receives the largest share of everything and assigns household chores and field work. The husband sleeps with each of his wives for three days.

- 684 In adultery, only the wife is punished. She is beaten and her ac-
837 complice pays an indemnity to her husband. This indemnity amounts to a quarter of the dowry. The wife confesses her adultery only when forced to by a series of corporal punishments which range from blows to being tied to a tree full of ants (akokum).

- 586 Repudiation is accomplished without difficulty: the man sends back his wife and the dowry is repaid him. The causes for repudiation are repeated adultery, the death of a child as a result of adultery, laziness, practice of fetishism, and excessive surveillance of the husband; sterility is not a reason for [90] repudiation. The children stay with the husband, and the woman, once repudiated, may remarry.

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the saying: "If the woman is the receptacle in which all can quench their thirst, she should not be carried off."

between these collective sanctions, and the very broad morality which allows a girl to "celebrate her youth" and which appears in the proverb: "Woman is an ear of dry corn in which anyone with teeth may bite." Marriage strengthens the socialization of woman, imposing on her [122] unconditional submission. One might say, to quote R. Bastide, that it consists in passing from "lustful sexuality" to "social sexuality."

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The social character of marriage is emphasized symbolically. A series of ceremonies mark the admission of the woman into the group that is receiving her. The mother of her husband recites the latter's genealogy, and a segregation of a week is imposed on her, after which she undergoes a coming-out ritual -- she is bathed and anointed with oil by the oldest woman relative -- [55] and she receives a new name, indicating a wish, which the other women give to her at a time of song and dance. (1) The "alliance"

1. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 89.

concluded between the two family groupings is demonstrated by meals taken together and by rejoicing (éyalö), and above all, it is [76] consecrated by the sacrifice of an animal destined for the biéri (ancestors' altar) of the young girl's parents, showing that bonds exist not only with the group of living but also with the community of ancestors. (2) The emphasis is thus laid on taking possession of

2. No doubt it is necessary to link this sacred character of the alliance to the violence of collective reactions provoked by "women affairs."

the posterity (in this respect the recitation of the genealogy appears to be very significant) and on the creation of an alliance (the same

581 word abè meaning both the bond and those joined) imposing peace
 585 and mutual assistance. In this way the two essential functions of the woman are revealed: she is an element of fecundity and a maker of peace and assistance. These are the elements on which traditional Fang society is based. Hence it is easy to understand the control exercised by the group by restricting freedom of choice of a spouse — through the medium of the head of the family, it seeks the alliance which will be of greatest advantage to it (3) — and by

3. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., "In the past the opinion of the interested parties mattered little. The request is made by the head of one family to the head of another family."

intervening when the flight or rape of the woman would compromise the equilibrium brought about by the marriage.

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 584 The method itself of marriage marks the development of a series of exchanges between the two family groups it unites. With the first phase known as the "betrothal," dzâga, the young man acquires pre-eminence over the chosen girl. He has the right to live with her for several days, but his family must provide the "fiancée's" parents with the first presents and must lend assistance at the time of various undertakings (clearing undergrowth, building huts, hunting [123] or fishing expeditions). During this period the girl's father determines the amount of the bride price, nswa. The second period corresponds to the payment of this bride price, which may be made at intervals, provided that the first payment be the largest. This often gives rise to arguments and palavers. On the other hand, the nikia ("he who has received the bride price") is obliged to bring compensation in the form of gifts, usually of animals, which are called mévalö. Finally, the third phase corresponds to the "handing over of the fiancée" and to her settlement in the midst of the family grouping of the young man. It involves the ceremony we have described. The woman, according to Largeau, becomes truly the wife (mônöga), and not merely the concubine, from the moment when she is able to cook for her husband after

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1. This lack is also pointed out by Balandier,
op. cit., p. 544.

A careful study of village names in several subdivisions has not turned up a name that seems connected with ideas of market, exchange, or trade. Moreover, vocabularies for such subjects are very limited.

And, into this land so unprepared for an economic /sic/ life, world economy is penetrating with all its complexity, setting a purchase price for the total output, which has fluctuations the planters obviously cannot understand. Their dismay is natural, since they have not even been able to become familiar with ideas about price, demand, or bargaining through traditions of trade.

It goes without saying that the time when salt was the item most in demand is long since past. However, bags of salt appear among traditional wedding presents, and the manufacture of salt from lye-washed palm ash is still known, though the product is only sold — and moreover very rarely — for its medicinal properties.

Expenditures have become extremely diversified, as shown by the analysis of an average family budget: (2)

2. These figures drawn from Budgets familiaux au Cameroun /Family Budgets in the Cameroons/, p. 150, do not take into account, we must remember, auto consumption.

Food	14	percent	Household articles .	1.9	percent
Textiles	17.4	-	Equipment	7.7	-
Bride price	13	-	Taxes	8.5	-
Housing and furniture . .	7.5	-	Medicaments	1.3	-
Bedding	1.5	-	Education	0.9	-
Lighting and upkeep . . .	3	-	Gifts and		
Trips	2	-	miscellaneous . . .	6	-

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Food now includes, even in the bush, imported items like stock-fish or like the bread, sardines, sugar, and condensed milk that are used less regularly. Clothes are the main item of expense. The desire to follow Paris fashions is perhaps not a national trait peculiar

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Whatever the kind of marriage, the first wife is the only one considered [574] as truly legitimate. As soon as she enters her new hut, her husband leads her by the hand before the évora biéri, which is kept tightly closed. Throughout her life, the wife will never be allowed to look into the box, as that would entail a very grave ritual offense. She now takes a bit of palm oil brought from her own village, mixes it with some from her husband's mother, and rubs this symbolic mixture on the statue on top of the évora. This is a symbol of the fertility she asks of the ancestors and the guardian spirits of the race. She next [182] puts a few grains of maize in a small basket at the base of the statue, so that her future plantations may thrive. This sacrifice should be repeated every morning, but only by the principal wife -- and it is often omitted.

4. Hunting, Fishing, Husbandry

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Before starting on a hunting or fishing expedition, likewise before going out to the first work on his plantation, every family head or warrior will be sure to invoke his totem. He does this first with an offering on the biéri box, then by touching his weapons, tools, or snares against the family totem.

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In the case of hunting, the hunter, when charging his gun, mixes some of the ashes of totemic sacrifice with his small shot, puts his hand on his totem, and leaves confident of the outcome. Even if hunting does not come up to expectation, he would never dream of blaming his totem. He would think that he had had bad luck or, more likely, that he had committed some offense.

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When going fishing, he carries some of the sacrificial ashes hidden in a rag. At the spot he thinks propitious, he always begins by throwing the ashes into the water, in order to obtain his totem's good will.

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Likewise, when a man starts farming, at the beginning of each dry season, before giving the first ax blow to the trees to be cut down, he places some ashes or remnants of sacrifice in some kind of hole and sees to it that they are consumed by the